

As we have seen over the past decade, our laws have been inadequate to curb what became a free-for-all for contractors overseas. That is why I support efforts like this one, to define and reign in unacceptable and damaging contractor abuses.

In my own state of Oregon, 26 Oregon National Guardsmen have filed suit against war contractor KBR, formerly a subsidiary of Halliburton, alleging that KBR personnel knew a highly toxic chemical was present at Iraqi facilities in 2003, but that they waited months before bringing it to the attention of the US military. By that time, unsuspecting members of the Oregon, Indiana, and West Virginia National Guard had already been exposed.

Even more troubling, if KBR is found to be at fault the company may never have to pay for its actions. A still-classified clause in KBR's contract may result in the US Army – and US taxpayers – paying for the harm done by contractors.

This is just one instance of past contractor actions having continued repercussions today. I continue to work for swift congressional action that will hold contractors accountable, strengthen oversight and protect both our troops and the taxpayers.

In the coming days I will ask for more answers from the Department of Defense and develop legislation to ensure Congress is never again left in the dark – and on the hook – for harm committed by contractor negligence.

I strongly support Mr. Welch's efforts here today, and those who help tackle this problem on behalf of our brave men and women in uniform.